

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 TOKYO 3093

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: JA, PINT, PEPR
SUBJECT: SONODA AT THE FOREIGN OFFICE: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON HIS
FIRST THREE MONTHS AS FOREIGN MINISTER

REF: 77 TOKYO 18355

SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH SECOND FUKUDA CABINET IS STILL LESS THAN THREE
MONTHS OLD, NEW FONMIN SONODA HAS ALREADY BROUGHT TO FONOFF SENSE
OF ASSERTIVE LEADERSHIP SINGULARLY LACKING WITH HATOYAMA. WHILE
SONODA'S ENERGY AND POLITICAL CLOUT SHOULD WORK TO FONOFF'S
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ADVANTAGE IN GOJ'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESS. THIS HAS YET TO BE
TESTED ON MAJOR ISSUE. ON THAT ISSUE IN WHICH HE HAS BEEN MOST
INTERESTED, SINO-JAPANESE PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP TREATY, SONODA
HAD BEEN FRUSTRATED BY LACK OF DRAMATIC PROGRESS. RELATIVELY
INEXPERIENCED IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SONODA HAS TAKEN CARE THUS FAR
TO FOLLOW LEAD OF FONOFF ADVISORS, BUT THERE REMAINS CONCERN
THAT, AS IN PAST, HIS ACTIVISM AND AMBITION MAY YET OCCASION

PROBLEMS. END SUMMARY.

1. ONE OF FEW HOLD-OVERS FROM FIRST FUKUDA CABINET, SUNAO SONODA, AN UNUSUALLY TOUGH, AMBITIOUS AND SHREWD UP-FROM-THE-RANKS LDP POLITICIAN, CAME TO FONOFF FOLLOWING LAST NOVEMBER'S CABINET RE-SHUFFLE (REFTEL). ALTHOUGH SOMEWHAT REGRETFUL AT HAVING TO LEAVE KEY POST OF CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY AND RELATIVELY INEXPERIENCED IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SONODA HAS ATTACKED HIS NEW JOB AS FONMIN WITH CHARACTERISTIC ENERGY AND PANACHE. AFTER THREE MONTHS AS FONMIN, HIS STYLE HAS PROVIDED DRAMATIC AND WELCOME CONTRAST WITH THAT OF HIS SOFT-SPOKEN AND DIFFIDENT PREDECESSOR IICHIRO HATOYAMA, BUT FONOFF OFFICIALS AND JOURNALISTS ARE OF MIXED OPINIONS AS TO POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF HIS LEADERSHIP.

2. WITHIN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE SYSTEM, IMPACT OF AN INDIVIDUAL FONMIN HAS BY AND LARGE BEEN LIMITED AND CUSHIONED BY BUREAUCRACY'S TRADITIONALLY STRONG ROLE IN DEVELOPMENT OF POLICY, REQUIREMENT OF CABINET APPROVAL OF ANY MAJOR INITIATIVE, AND BROAD POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS INHIBITING DRAMATIC DIPLOMATIC ACTIVISM. FONMIN DOES, HOWEVER, PLAY CRUCIAL LEADERSHIP ROLE IN REPRESENTING INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL INTERESTS AND VIEWS OF FONOFF PROFESSIONALS WITHIN JAPAN'S INTERNAL PROCESS OF DECISION-MAKING BY CONSENSUS. FONMIN'S SKILL AS CONSENSUS-BUILDER IS IMPORTANT TO USG SINCE FONOFF GENERALLY REPRESENTS ELEMENT WITHIN JAPANESE BODY POLITIC MOST SYMPATHETIC TO US CONCERNS.

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3. NOT SURPRISINGLY, SONODA HAS BEEN MOST FREQUENTLY MEASURED AGAINST HIS IMMEDIATE PREDECESSOR HATOYAMA, UNDER WHOM FONOFF'S MORALE AND INTRA-GOVERNMENTAL CLOUT SANK TO UNUSUAL LOW. THERE HAS BEEN GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT HATOYAMA'S MOST SERIOUS FAILING LAY LESS WITH HIS DIFFICULTIES IN DEALING WITH FOREIGN COUNTER-PARTS THAN IN HIS WEAKNESS IN LEADING AND SUPPORTING FONOFF VIS-A-VIS OTHER MINISTRIES, DIET, AND DOMESTIC INTEREST GROUPS. BY ALL ACCOUNTS, HATOYAMA ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE INTIMIDATED (REPORTEDLY TO POINT OF SILENCE IN SOME CABINET EXCHANGES) BY MORE ASSERTIVE AND POLITICALLY POWERFUL OPPONENTS. ACCORDING TO SOME OFFICIALS, EVEN WITH FONOFF HATOYAMA DISPLAYED DISINTEREST AND RELUCTANCE IN FOLLOWING-UP REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS SUBMITTED TO HIS OFFICE.

4. IN CONTRAST, SONODA HAS DELIBERATELY ASSUMED ROLE OF ENERGETIC AND AGGRESSIVE LEADER, STARTING FROM HIS FIRST DAY AS FONMIN WITH SPEECH TO ASSEMBLED OFFICIALS ANNOUNCING HIS INTENTION TO INCREASE FONOFF'S VOICE WITHIN GOVERNMENT: "YOU HAVE BEEN TOO

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CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

WEAK; I AM HERE TO TEACH YOU HOW TO FIGHT." SINCE THEN, SONODA
HAD REPEATEDLY EMPHASIZED TO SUBORDINATES BOTH HIS INTEREST IN
FONOFF POLICY PROPOSALS AND HIS DESIRE TO BE FORECEFUL ADVOCATE.
SONODA'S MOTIVES HAVE APPARENTLY BEEN BASED LESS ON ANY POLICY
CONSDIERATIONS THAN HIS OWN AGGRESSIVE PERSONALITY AND AMBITION
-- STRONG PERFORMANCE AS FONMIN WOULD BE NECESSARY STEPPING-
STONE FOR FUTURE PRIME MINISTERSHIP, GOAL SONODA HAS BEEN WIDELY
ASSUMED TO SEEK. THERE IS NOW GENERAL EXPECTATION AMONG OFFICIALS
THAT HIS LEADERSHIP WILL WORK TO FONOFF'S ADVANTAGE IN DEALING
WITH OTHER MINISTRIES AND DIET.

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5. THUS FAR, HOWEVER, SONODA'S LEADERSHIP HAS NOT BEEN PUT TO
SERIOUS TEST ON MAJOR DIVISIVE ISSUE. WHILE SONODA UNDOUBTEDLY

CONTRIBUTED TO RELATIVELY TOUGH TONE TAKEN BY JAPANESE DELEGATION DURING MOSCOW MINISTERIALS IN JANUARY, THERE HAD BEEN IN FACT ALMOST UNIVERSAL AGREEMENT WITHIN GOJ ON NEED TO TAKE FIRM STAND WITH SOVIETS ON NORTHERN TERRITORIES ISSUE. SIMILARLY, ALTHOUGH SONODA ALMOST SINGLE-HANDEDLY PROMOTED HIS RECENT TRIP TO MIDEAST, THERE HAD BEEN RELATIVELY LITTLE DISAGREEMENT OVER BASIC OBJECTIVE OF CULTIVATING BETTER RELATIONS WITH ARAB OIL-PRODUCERS.

6. IN RECENT US-JAPAN TRADE TALKS, HOWEVER, DURING WHICH THERE WERE SERIOUS DIFFERENCES OF OPINION WITHIN GOJ AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP, PRIMARY ACTION RESTED WITH MINISTERS MIYAZAWA, KOMOTO AND USHIBA. WHILE SONODA DID RECOGNIZE IMPORTANCE OF PROBLEM AND DID PARTICIPATE TO SOME DEGREE, ON WHOLE HIS ROLE WAS RELATIVELY CIRCUMSCRIBED BOTH BY DEMANDS OF HIS SOVIET AND MIDEAST TRIPS AND BY HIS LACK OF EXPERTISE IN TRADE MATTERS. IN WHAT APPEARS TO BE EFFECTIVE DIVISION OF LABOR ACCEPTED BY SONODA, FONOFF'S POSITIONS ON TRADE AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC PROBLEMS ARE REPRESENTED LESS BY FONMIN THAN THROUGH MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO USHIBA. HIGHLY-RESPECTED CAREER DIPLOMAT WITH CONFIDENCE OF PM FUKUDA, USHIBA WORKS OUT OF OFFICE WITHIN FONOFF AND DRAWS HEAVILY ON THAT MINISTRY'S STAFF; FOR INSTANCE, THOUGH NOMINALLY UNDER SONODA'S COMMAND, DEPUTY FONMIN FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS MIYAZAKI APPARENTLY REPORTS DIRECTLY AND FREQUENTLY TO USHIBA.

7. AS LDP DIET MEMBER AND SUBSEQUENTLY AS CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY, SONODA WAS RELATIVELY INDIFFERENT TO MOST FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES WITH ONE NOTABLE EXCEPTION: HE HAS BEEN UNUSUALLY VOCAL ADVOCATE OF SIGNING LONG-DELAYED PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP TREATY (PFT) WITH CHINA. HERE, HOWEVER, SONODA HAS SUFFERED SOME FRUSTRATION. HE HAS MADE NO SECRET OF HIS DESIRE TO PLAY MAJOR CONFIDENTIAL

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AND PUBLICLY-VISIBLE ROLE IN ACHIEVING RAPID CONCLUSION OF TREATY, POSSIBLY THROUGH PERSONAL VISIT TO PEKING (WHICH ACCORDING TO SOME SOURCES HE HOPES TO MAKE AS EARLY AS MARCH). BUT DESPITE GENERAL EXPECTATION OF SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS ON PFT IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING SONODA'S MOSCOW VISIT, INFORMAL TALKS WITH CHINESE ON RE-OPENING PFT NEGOTIATIONS HAVE THUS FAR REMAINED IN TENTATIVE STAGE WITH NO OBVIOUS PROSPECT OF EARLY SUCCESS. SENIOR FONOFF STAFFER HAS NOTED BASIC DIFFERENCE IN APPROACH TO THIS PROBLEM BETWEEN PM FUKUDA AND SONODA: FUKUDA WOULD APPARENTLY MOVE AHEAD ON PFT ONLY IN ESSENTIALLY NO-RISK SITUATION, I.E., CHINESE WOULD HAVE TO PROVIDE PRIOR ASSURANCE OF SOME FLEXIBILITY ON PUBLIC INTERPRETATION OF ANTI-HEGEMONY LANGUAGE SO THAT ONCE BEGUN, FORMAL AND PUBLIC NEGOTIATIONS COULD SUCCEED RAPIDLY. SONODA, ON OTHER HAND, HAS CONTINUED TO PRESS FOR QUICK NEGOTIATION AND SIGNATURE OF TREATY ON GAMBLE THAT CHINESE WOULD NOT SUBSEQUENTLY OBJECT TO GOJ'S PUBLIC DISCLAIMERS OF ANY ANTI-SOVIET CONNOTATION TO PFT.

8. FONOFF OFFICIALS WITH CLOSE KNOWLEDGE OF SONODA HAVE OBSERVED THAT AS FONMIN, HE HAS APPEARED ACUTELY CONSCIOUS OF HIS LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF DIPLOMATIC ISSUES AND DETAILS REQUIRED BY HIS NEW OPERATIONAL DUTIES. CONSEQUENTLY, ALTHOUGH QUITE DISDAINFUL IN PAST OF FONOFF PROFESSIONALS, SONODA HAS THUS FAR TAKEN PAINS TO RELY ON SUBORDINATES FOR BRIEFING AND GUIDANCE. VICE FONMIN ARITA HAS DEVELOPED CLOSE WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH SONODA, SEEING FONMIN FOR EXCHANGES OF VIEWS AT

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LEAST THREE TIMES DAILY (ARITA PREVIOUSLY MET WITH HATOYAMA ONCE A DAY AT BEST). SONODA, BOTH OFFICIALS AND JOURNALISTS HAVE NOTED, HAS BEEN NOTICEABLY MORE RELAXED IN PRESENT JOB THAN AS CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY, IN LARGE PART BECAUSE HIS ROLE WAS NOW THAT OF MASTER OF HIS OWN HOUSE RATHER THAN RETAINER. THEY SUSPECTED

THIS FACTOR HAD ALSO CONTRIBUTED TO SONODA'S SOMEWHAT BETTER RELATIONS WITHIN FONOFF.

9. ALTHOUGH GENERALLY PLEASED BY PRESENCE OF STRONG POLITICIAN AT FONOFF, SEVERAL OFFICIALS HAVE EXPRESSED CONFIDENTIAL

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CONCERN THAT SONODA'S INCLINATION FOR QUICK ACTION AND PUBLIC COMMENT MIGHT OCCASION, IF NOT MAJOR DIPLOMATIC PROBLEMS, SOME AWKWARDNESS IN COORDINATION OF POLICIES BOTH INTERNALLY AND WITH OTHER NATIONS. REFLECTING IN PART THEIR OWN INSTITUTIONAL BIASES, THEY HAVE CAUTIONED THAT AS SONODA GAINS CONFIDENCE IN HIS NEW JOB, HE MIGHT BECOME MORE LIKELY TO TAKE ACTION, OFTEN FOR ACTION'S SAKE, IRRESPECTIVE OF EXPERTS' RECOMMENDATIONS OR LONGER-TERM CONSIDERATIONS. HIS SENSITIVITY TO PUBLIC OPINION HAVING BEEN HONED BY YEARS AS PRACTICAL POLITICIAN, SONODA FREQUENTLY FORMS VIEWS ON PARTICULAR SUBJECTS ON BASIS OF MORNING HEADLINES, AND ONCE SET, IS OFTEN DIFFICULT TO PERSUADE OTHERWISE. ACCORDING TO SOME OFFICIALS, THIS APPARENTLY HAPPENED IN REGARD TO POSSIBLE BAN ON NUCLEAR-POWERED SATELLITES, IN WHICH WORKING-LEVEL HAS BEEN HARD-PRESSED TO CURB FONMIN'S EAGERNESS FOR SOME FORM OF DRAMATIC "OUTER SPACE INITIATIVE" ON PART OF GOJ IN RESPONSE TO PUBLIC AND MEDIA CONCERN OVER COSMOS INCIDENT.

10. GIVEN NUMEROUS CONSTRAINTS WITHIN JAPANESE SYSTEM ON FONMIN'S ABILITY TO TAKE MAJOR DIPLOMATIC ACTIONS UNILATERALLY, IT IS LIKELY MOST OF SONODA'S FUTURE PROBLEMS MIGHT STEM FROM HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS. AS CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY, SONODA BECAME WELL-KNOWN FOR HIS EXTENSIVE AND AT TIMES INJUDICIOUS COMMENTS TO PRESS, FREQUENTLY GOING BEYOND PREPARED GUIDANCE AND OCCASIONALLY CAUSING SOME EMBARRASSMENT FOR GOJ (EARNING HIMSELF PRESS CORPS NICKNAME AS "THE UNDERGROUND BROADCASTING STATION.") IN NAMING SONODA AS FONMIN, PM FUKUDA REPORTEDLY WANTED HIM TO EXERCISE GREATER CAUTION IN HIS OFF-THE-CUFF REMARKS. THERE HAVE BEEN INDICATIONS THAT AFTER INITIAL PERIOD OF RELATIVE RESTRAINT, SONODA CONFIDENTIAL

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HAS BEGUN TO RETURN TO EARLIER HABITS, AS EVIDENCED, FOR EXAMPLE, BY HIS COMMENT THAT SINO-JAPANESE PFT WAS IN ACCORD WITH US GLOBAL STRATEGY, MOMENTARY CONFUSION SURROUNDING HIS REMARKS ON APPLICABILITY OF PRIOR

CONSULTATION FOR INTRODUCTION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN TIMES OF PEACE AS WELL AS WAR, AND AD HOC INTERPRETATION AS TO CONSTITUTIONALITY OF TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROBLEM, FONOFF OFFICIALS HAVE OBSERVED, HAS BEEN COMPOUNDED BY RECENT ROTATION TO FONOFF PRESS CLUB OF MANY REPORTERS EXPERIENCED IN COVERING SONODA BUT UNFAMILIAR WITH FOREIGN AFFAIRS NUANCES.

11. DOMESTIC POLITICS HAS ALWAYS EXERCISED CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE ON ACTIONS OF ANY JAPANESE FONMIN, AND THIS WILL BE PARTICULARLY TRUE OF SONODA DURING COMING YEAR. ALTHOUGH SONODA HAS DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF IN PAST BY HIS LOYALTY AS FUKUDA LIEUTENANT, HE IS ALSO INTENSELY AMBITIOUS AND HAS NOT YET SHOWN ANY INDICATION HE HAS GIVEN UP HOPES OF MUCH HIGHER ADVANCEMENT. AGAINST BACKGROUND OF HINTS--SOME FROM STAFFER CLOSE TO HIM -- THAT SONODA IS CAREFULLY STRENGTHENING HIS TIES WITH OHIRA AND TANAKA CAMPS, FONMIN HAS RECENTLY INTIMATED TO REPORTERS THAT HIS DAYS AS BLINDLY-DEVOTED LITTLE JOHN TO FUKUDA'S ROBIN HOOD MIGHT BE LIMITED. THIS SUGGESTS TO US, LESS ANY MAJOR BREAK WITH FUKUDA THAN AN ASSERTION OF HIS OWN LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL AND ATTEMPT TO GORGE TIES ESSENTIAL FOR HIGHER OFFICE BID. SONODA HAS SEVERAL IMPORTANT ASSETS, NOT LEAST OF WHICH ARE DIET SENIORITY AND CONSIDERABLE EXPERIENCE IN NITTY-GRITTY OF PARTY WORK, WHICH WILL HELP HIM TO REMAIN IN LDP'S FRONT RANKS. TO STAY THERE, HOWEVER, IT WILL BE IMPORTANT THAT SONODA'S TENURE AS FONMIN BE WIDELY PERCEIVED AS SUCCESSFUL.

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